

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

May 1, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write to urge you to include aquaculture growers and commercial fisheries as part of the recently announced \$19 billion United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) pandemic relief package.

The aquaculture industry and commercial fisheries have been hit especially hard by the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. While other agriculture industries have used grocery sales to help compensate for the loss in restaurant revenue, this is not a viable option for shellfish growers. Sales to restaurants, caterers, and other food service businesses make up almost 70% of the aquaculture industry's annual revenue.<sup>1</sup> Logistical challenges and consumer preferences limit the ability of seafood producers to rapidly shift their production to the grocery market. With most restaurants in the United States either closed or operating at significantly reduced capacity, many producers report seeing demand for their products disappearing overnight.

While aquaculture growers and commercial fisheries are seeing their revenues collapse, food banks are reporting a 70% increase in demand for food assistance.<sup>2</sup> Supporting these industries will bolster this important economic engine while also helping Americans access a highly nutritious food source. In fact, USDA already recommends that Americans eat fish or shellfish twice a week.<sup>3</sup>

Peak oyster and clam harvest season has just finished in many parts of the country. Unless something is done to support growers, millions of pounds of fresh shellfish risk being wasted, and an industry worth almost \$1.5 billion could face devastating economic consequences.

USDA's \$16 billion in direct support to farmers and ranchers should include aquaculture growers and commercial fishery producers as eligible recipients. We also encourage USDA to

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<sup>1</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *Fisheries of the United States, 2017 Report*. December 2018. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/fisheries-united-states-2017-report>

<sup>2</sup> Business Insider, "Will we have enough food?: Millions of Americans are now unemployed and hungry. Food banks worry they can't feed them." April 22, 2020. <https://www.businessinsider.com/food-banks-feeding-americans-unemployment-hunger-2020-4>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, "10 Tips: Eat Seafood Twice a Week." <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/ten-tips-eat-seafood>

work with stakeholders in these industries to develop solutions to any regulatory or logistical challenges associated with using shellfish and other seafood products for its planned \$3 billion commodity purchase and distribution program.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter and for your work on behalf of consumers and food producers.

Sincerely,



Elaine G. Luria  
Member of Congress



Robert J. Wittman  
Member of Congress



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott  
Member of Congress